ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 10

NEW YORK TIMES
17 November 1985

Reagan Aides Upset by Disclosure Of Weinberger's Letter on Arms

President in Geneva — Official Sees an Effort to Sabotage Meeting

By BERNARD WEINRAUB
Special to The New York Times

GENEVA, Nov. 16 — President Reagan arrived here today for the Soviet-American summit meeting amid a dispute over the disclosure of a letter written by Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger urging that no accords be made on two key arms issues.

En route to Geneva, a White House official said he was "astonished" and "perplexed" at the letter, which was published in The New York Times today. An article about the letter, which was not made public officially, also appeared in The Washington Post.

The letter was attached to a Defense Department report to the President on purported Soviet violations of arms control agreements. The letter and the report were obtained by The New York Times from an Administration source.

The White House official who said that the letter "astonished" him was asked whether, in his view, the release of the letter to the press had been intended to sabotage the summit talks.

"Sure it was," the official said.

Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman, said: "The President would have preferred to read it in the privacy of the Oval Office and not in The New York Times."

[In Washington, Mr. Weinberger's spokesman, Robert Sims, said the Defense Department "had absolutely nothing to do with the release of the letter." Mr. Sims said that it was Mr. Weinberger's policy not to publicly discuss any advice to the President and that the Secretary was "outraged at the disclosure and ordered an immediate investigation."

[When asked about the comment of the White House official that the disclosure was intended to sabotage the summit meeting, Mr. Sims said, "The Secretary would agree that the public release of his private letter to the President was not helpful and feels equally disturbed and concerned."]

Mr. Weinberger, who will not be at the summit meeting, on their personalities, on their domestic pressures and on how each will react on the spot to the dramatic moment of the talks.

Their predecessors, faced with similar opportunities and dangers, generally shied away from bold strokes. The major treaties on limiting offensive arms, reached in 1972 and 1979, were modest and temporizing. Leaders at past summit meetings avoided far-reaching moves when confronted with the uncertainties and complexities of arms control and the deadening mutual suspicions.

For this summit meeting, Administration officials said they expected more of the same. But none of them seemed confident they knew what Mr. Reagan was thinking, or what he would do, or even if the President himself knew in his own mind at this point. How important will reaching agreement be to him in Geneva? Does he believe that he must make significant progress there to have any hope of completing an arms treaty before his term expires?

Administration officials were also none too sure that they understood how Mr. Gorbachev would play his cards, or whether his hands were even more bound by the committee structure of the ruling Politburo than Mr. Reagan's are by presiding over a democracy.

These officials said they assumed Mr. Gorbachev did not want a summit meeting failure. But is stopping Mr. Reagan's plans for space-based missile defenses important enough to him that he will risk a failure? Would such a move be a bluff or genuine?

Proposals and Strategies

In the briefing book being made ready for Mr. Reagan, there are sections on the proposals, on the relative bargaining chips and positions, and on strategies. In the minds and briefcases of some of his advisers are also ideas on possible terms of agreement.

Moscow advanced a new proposal in October, and Washington countered with one in early November. The net effect of the moves was to set up the ideas of 50 percent reductions in strategic or intercontinental-range missiles and bombers, plus a separate agreement on medium-range forces in Europe, also with cuts in the 50 percent range.

There was no discernible movement on space-based defenses, which Mr. Gorbachev sees as meaning a new and more dangerous arms race and which Mr. Reagan believes is the moral and necessary path to the future.

Thus, the kernel of the bargaining deadlock remains. For Moscow, there can be no deep reductions in offensive strategic forces until the United States abandons all efforts to develop "space strike weapons." For Washington, there should be deep cuts in offensive forces now, even as the two sides turn to the more complicated task of figuring out how to phase in defenses as offenses are phased out.

Won't Get Into Details

Officials on both sides neither anticipate, nor want, their leader to get into the details. Administration officials differ on whether Mr. Reagan should even try to compromise on generalities.

Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and his aides argue that to agree on general principles or guidelines without getting into the details would seriously prejudice subsequent negotiation on the all-important details. To them, this would be buying a moment of glory in Geneva at a high cost later. Their idea of talking while agreeing to nothing is more or less the Administration's public stance.

Privately and very quietly, the Secretary of State, George P. Shultz; Paul H. Nitze, the senior arms control adviser, and Robert C. McFarlane, the national security adviser, are said to be thinking about possible agreement on guidelines for the arms negotiators. Only Mr. Nitze has been talking about this publicly.

They are said to believe that Mr. Reagan could nail down some key principles on offensive cuts. For this, he would have to lower his rhetorical sights on antimissile defenses, talk only about research and agree to negotiate on what constitutes acceptable research. Such negotiation would be a long and drawn-out process, during which time the Russians could be pressed for separate agreements on offense.

Guidelines Are Outlined

The guidelines, which would have the effect of stating areas of broad agreement, are said to look like this:

¶Cut all strategic missiles and bombers by 50 percent. This would leave vague just what is "strategic." Washington could say it meant only intercontinental forces. Moscow could say it still included American forces in and around Europe that could launch a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union. It is expected Moscow will eventually concede this point anyway, but ask for something in return.

¶Set a common ceiling of 6,000 nuclear weapons. Washington could continue to say this included only missile warheads and long-range air-launched cruise missiles. Moscow could say it included bombs and airborne short-range attack missiles as well.

¶Establish a limit of 3,000 on land-

Continued

based missile warheads. Moscow is proposing 3,600. Even some figure in between would require Moscow to make deep cuts in its heavy SS-18 and SS-19 missiles. Cuts in these heavy missiles has been the Administration's overriding goal, and it would be Moscow's most important concession thus far.

¶Agree to pursue a separate pact on medium-range forces, looking toward 50 percent cuts on both sides. Moscow is prepared to do this, although its initial position was that this had to be settled along with strategic offenses and defenses. This would still leave in abeyance the key Soviet demand of including French and British forces.

¶State that both sides should strictly adhere to the Antiballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, reaffirm that the treaty permits research, and then negotiate on where and how to draw the line between permissible research and banned development and testing.

Groundwork Is Laid

The groundwork has been laid for this. On Oct. 14, Mr. Shultz said Mr. Reagan's research program for missile defense, officially called the Strategic Defense Initiative, "has been restructured and, as the President has reaffirmed, will continue to be conducted in accordance with a restrictive interpretation of the treaty's obligations."

The formal Soviet position in the Geneva arms-control talks, which are now in recess, still calls for a ban on all space-strike weapons, including research on them. Public statements by Mr. Gorbachev and others have drawn a distinction between permissible fandamental or scientific research and all other activities that would be banned. To open up prospects for a deal, he would have to make the latter official.

Pentagon officials maintain that even "scientific research" as construed by Moscow would prohibit the Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as "Stars Wars," so there would be no sense in trying to fudge over the differences.

If Mr. Reagan chooses to follow Pentagon advice and not budge on space-based defenses and not try for agreed guidelines, would Mr. Gorbachev go along more or less quietly? The answer that Mr. Reagan is getting from most of his advisers is "yes," according to officials involved.

They are said to be telling him that the Soviet leader is not in a position to declare the summit meeting to be a great disappointment or failure. Their view is that Mr. Gorbachev is preoccupied with the consolidation of his power and with economics. They judge that he does not want to return home to questioning about his ability to manage relations with the United States peacefully and then face demands for increased millitary spending.

But some State Department and Central Intelligence Agency officials are known to argue that Mr. Gorbachev might be much more determined to kill "Star Wars" and might be willing to threaten to portray the summit meeting as a failure. Perhaps, they suggest, this might even strengthen his hand at home.

And over all, it is difficult to find any Administration official who expresses optimism — even those few who hold out the hope of agreement at the summit meeting on guidelines or even on principles. Their sense is that even assuming some kind of breakthrough at Geneva, the bargaining will continue long and hard for several more years, at best.